

Commands and Prohibitions in Ancient Greek

IMPERATIVES

The imperative is the mood of commands. Imperatives are formed by adding the following endings to the unaugmented stem of the appropriate principal part (1st for present imperative, 3rd for aorist active and middle, 6th for aorist passive). The negative of the imperative is μή. There is also a perfect imperative, but it is rare [Smyth 382, 697-8, 765, 599g, 712-714].

number	person	present, 2 nd aorist ACTIVE	present, 2 nd aorist MIDDLE/PASSIVE	1 st aorist ACTIVE	1 st aorist MIDDLE	aorist PASSIVE
singular	2 nd	-ε	-ου	-ον	-αι	-ηθι, -ητι
	3 rd	-έτω	-έσθω	-άτω	-άσθω	-ήτω
plural	2 nd	-ετε	-εσθε	-ατε	-ασθε	-ητε
	3 rd	-όντων	-έσθων	-άντων	-άσθων	-έντων

General observations:

- 1) The 2nd person plural imperative endings are the same as the 2nd person plural indicative endings.
- 2) The 3rd person plural imperative endings of the present, 1st and 2nd aorist active, and aorist passive are the same as the corresponding masculine / neuter genitive plural participle endings.
- 3) The 2nd person singular 1st aorist middle imperative ending counts short for accentuation; e.g., λῦσαι.
- 4) Accent on the imperative is recessive, with one major exception: the accent on the 2nd person singular 2nd aorist imperative middle is always circumflex on the ultima; e.g., λιποῦ. Note also the exceptional accent on the 2nd aorist active imperative 2nd singular λαβέ (from λαμβάνω), εἰπέ (from λέγω), ἰδέ (from ὀράω), and ἐλθέ (from ἔρχομαι); the accent on compounds of these verbs is however recessive (ἄπελθε, σύλλαβε).
- 5) The 2nd person singular aorist passive imperative ending is -ηθι, except for stems ending in -Θ-, in which case the ending is -ητι (dissimilation of aspirates). Thus, on the one hand, κλάπηθι from κλέπτω (6th principal part ἐκλάπην); on the other hand, λύθητι from λύω (6th principal part = ἐλύθην).
- 6) Since imperatives refer logically to future acts, they are considered primary sequence verbs, and the present and aorist differ in aspect, rather than tense.
- 7) NOTE: multiple commands are regularly formed by stringing together participles in the nominative with a single imperative. thus, for example, λάβαντες τὰ χρήματα ἰόντων, "let them take the money and go!"
- 8) NOTE: common irregular forms in the second person singular including 1st aorist θές (from τίθημι), ἕξ (ἵημι), δός (δίδωμι); 2nd aorist σχές (ἔχω) [Smyth 466.1b].

PROHIBITIONS (NEGATIVE COMMANDS)

Greek uses different constructions to distinguish repeated action and point action, as well as person. The two moods used are the imperative and subjunctive. Prohibitions are introduced by μή or a compound of μή.

Person	Repeated Action	Point Action
1st (hortatory)	μή + present subjunctive	μή + aorist subjunctive
2nd (prohibitive)	μή + present imperative	μή + aorist subjunctive
3rd (prohibitive)	μή + present imperative	μή + aorist subjunctive

OTHER COMMAND CONSTRUCTIONS

Hortatory Subjunctive [Smyth 1797-9]: 1st person singular and plural.

σκοπῶμεν τάδε: "Let us consider these things."

Imperative Optative [Smyth 1820]: usually 3rd person.

τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν: "May you and your silver be destroyed." (Acts 8:20)

Jussive Infinitive [Smyth 2013]: found in poetry and solemn prose (e.g., legal language); occurs mainly in the 2nd person (singular and plural). The negative is μή.

θρασῶν νῦν, Διόμηδες, ἐπὶ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι: "take courage now, Diomedes, and fight the Trojans!"

Objective Clause of Effort [Smyth 2213]: ὅπως + future indicative; either commands or prohibitions; almost always in the 2nd person. Sometimes an imperative of σκοπέω or ὀράω introduces these constructions.

[σκόπε, σκόπετε] ὅπως ἔσεσθε ἄξιοι ἐλευθερίας.

"See to it that you will be worthy of freedom." i.e., "Be worthy of freedom."

[ὄρα, ὄρατε] ὅπως μὴ τὰ χρήματα λήψη.

"See to it that you don't take the money." i.e., "Don't take the money."